

Place, Psyche and Narrative: Unfolding the relationship between Geography and Human Psyche in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

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Abstract— *The paper explores the interplay between the place and psyche in fictional characters, analysing select individuals to demonstrate a profound relationship between the environment and character. The study reveals how settings shape identities, influence emotions and inform behaviours, underscoring the notion that place profoundly impacts the human experience.*

Keywords— *Bioregionalism, psyche, narrative, ecocriticism, home, life -place*



Ecocriticism has its focus on environment and human relationship to the natural world. It also seeks to study, explore and analyse the role of place in literature and other cultural texts. Gary Synders' statement in *The Practice of the Wild* is worth notable; "Nature is not a place to visit, it is home-and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places. Often there are areas that are difficult and remote, but all are known and even named" (7).

The paper tries to find how a long-term relationship with nature can inculcate a feeling of attachment in the human psyche towards the nature. It is found that a transient relationship with the landscape makes man uncanny towards nature which has aggravated the alienation of man from nature. The aboriginals highly revered the elements of nature and they believed that the humans are a part of the living earth. Chief Seattle's, in a version of his speech says "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people...we are part of the earth and it is part of us" (187). But as time goes by, people ignored the existence of mother earth and started commodifying the elements of nature as objects for buying and selling. Greg Garrard shares his thoughts on the term dwelling in *Ecocriticism* as "Dwelling is not a transient state; rather it implies the long-

term imbrications of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual life and work" (108).

Ecological consciousness and eco-sensitivity are very evident in the ancient Indian texts like *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Puranas*. Nature has been enunciated and revered in ancient Indian culture. Pancha bhutas or the five elements of nature-earth, sky, air, water and fire were honoured. But through the last couple of centuries, several factors have combined to break the sacred bond between the nature and humans. According to Glen Love in the article "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," "the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world" It encourages people to get to know one's place intimately to fit human communities to the earth. It is a movement not to distort the earth to our demands but to comfort the earth with our little efforts. The paper aims at bringing a positive shift in the attitude of the people by giving a proper awareness about their natural system.

Bioregional thinking is an ideology in ecocriticism which places primary value on direct experience in a place, along with the inheritance of knowledge we draw from our spiritual traditions, myths, philosophy and science. It provides the perspective that by living within the limits and

the gifts provided by a particular place, it is possible to create a way of life that can be passed on to the future generation. The motivational philosophers behind this movement were Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Gary Synder and Stephanie Mills. Their ideology aimed to address matters of pressing environmental concern through a politics derived from a local sense of place. It got its momentum in the later years which had spread to almost all parts of the world.

Their intention was to create a sort of parallel culture and to redefine the locus of place. Though it emerged in the West as an environmental movement in the late 70s, the primitive Indians had practiced it, as a part of their culture, centuries back. They might not have named it, but were aware of the importance of living with nature with a better awareness about their life-place. They had adopted a life style which was integrated with nature. They had lived in accordance with the topography of their region. their work based on natural communities or watersheds. The term bioregionalism was first conceived by Allen Van Newkirk, the theory of bioregionalism is elaborated in *Home! A Bioregional Reader* in which Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Jim Dodge, Gary Synder, Judith Plant and Christopher Plant. According to Luanne Armstrong, in her article titled "Home" says that; "Home is where I was born, where I grew up, where I have lived most of my life. Wherever else I live, what I continue to refer to as home is this place; not just an owned place, but a wholly lived -in-place"(51)

Robert L. Thayer Jr. in his book *Life Place: Bioregional Thought and Practice* defined a bioregion as "A bioregion is literally and etymologically a 'life-place'- a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and non-human living communities"(3).

Peter Berg in his essay "More Than Just Saving What's Left" defined bioregion: "*Bioregions* are the natural locales in which everyone lives" (14). Though there are numerous definitions available on bioregionalism, it is Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann who has extended the scope of bioregionalism by defining bioregion as both a "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness...a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place"(Buell 36).

Robert Thayer explains the concept of life-place thus:

The first step toward a regenerative future for humans is to reassess where we are. (8) Each region has their special identifiable trees, flowers The health of the ocean depends on the health of rivers; the health of the rivers depend on

the health of small streams; the health of small streams depend on the health of their watersheds. The health of the water is exactly the health of the land; the health of the small places is exactly the health of the large places."(Lynch 371-372)

The article tries to critically analyse the novel *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph from a place based perspective and to understand the importance of human psyche in constructing long term relationships with nature. Sarah Joseph is an eminent writer in Malayalam. She is a novelist, short story writer, essayist, playwright, and a critic. A feminist and an environmental activist, she is the founder of an organization called Manushi, an organization of thinking woman. Her novel *Aathi* was translated concurrently into English as *Gift in Green* by Rev Dr Valson Thampu, the former Principal of St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. The novel *Gift in Green* is a fictional narrative.

A narrative is simply a written account that provides readers access to events that are connected to each other within the context of a story. The characters of this fictional narrative were shaped by the water and soil of Aathi. Dinakaran is the protagonist and the other characters like Ponmani, Kunjimathu, Shylaja, Markose are all moulded by the geographical peculiarities of the place Aathi. Ms. Joseph evaluates her novel as a narration of lives very much involved with water, and by extension, about nature. At one level, the novel deals with the socio political aspects of human rights about water, and at another, it is an attempt to explore man's spiritual connection with water. The novel *Gift in Green* is the result of her investigations into the conceptual, philosophical, historical and organic significance of water in the Universe. All religious texts say water is fundamental to life and so consider it as pure and sacred. Humans consider water as sacred but seldom treat it as such. In fact, they contaminate it to the core. But the people of Aathi treat nature and its occupants, including humans, with an inviolable sense of equality.

Gift in Green is an unconventional novel with water as its main theme. It talks of the beauty and anguish of people and the land they inhabit. The novel is set in Aathi, a fictitious place, a lagoon which lies cool and serene, in the womb of an inviolate purity. Aathi has its own bioregion, with Pokkali farming, fish, mussels, and prawns, animals, birds and so on. They felt themselves to be one with trees, the birds, the water and the land. But the watershed was disrupted by the land filling acts by Kumaran, an entrepreneur who had abandoned Aathi long back despising the water- life. But his attempts were strongly protested by some villagers under the leadership of Dinakaran and

Kunjumathu. There are several other characters like Ponmani, Shylaja, Markose, Githanjali, Kayal, the mysterious girl, Chandra Mohan, Thampuran and the like who stood for the integrity of Aathi. It discusses the environmental issues with special focus of watershed conservation.

Gift in Green delineates on the elements of bioregionalism and correlates with eco consciousness. The people of Aathi understood the lessons of conserving their home and try to restore and maintain the local natural system and re-inhabitat the land which was once their asset. Ponmani is writing his thoughts on Dinakaran and his perspectives of Aathi. Stream of consciousness technique has used to bring home the inner thoughts of Ponmani. He recollects his memoirs of Dinakaran and sketches how they spent time in their childhood and youthful days in Aathi. Even though they differ in their opinions they were one in spirit, both were bleeding for Aathi. They were not ready to betray Aathi. Their characters were shaped by the water and soil of Aathi. Dinakaran was confused between the bridge between life and death. Ponmani listened to the voice of Dinakaran speaking to his soul. Dinakaran chose the path of death to give life to Aathi. The novel portrays how the Indians had connected their nature into their culture.

The novel addresses the cultural affiliation with their environment and its significance of aboriginal life, which was never understood by the new generation. It is significant to note that the description of landscape is not just an exercise to provide a frame to these novels, but it is a celebration of the topography of the native land which stands opposed to the denouncing of the assumed new world by the invaders. The land becomes the contested site, and it is the place one must return to for any kind of resolution.

“The mutually sustainable future of the humans, and other life-forms can best be achieved by means of a spatial frame work in which people live as rooted, active, participating members of a reasonably scaled, naturally bonded, ecologically defined territory, or life-place”(Thayer 6). The incongruity between our culturally constructed districts, zones, and networks and the natural abiotic and biotic tendencies of the lands upon which we live can be traced to the ways in which we understand where we are.

Largely, humans have forgotten where they live because they have ignored the natural dimension of the land. The first step toward a regenerative future for humans is to reassess where the current position held by every individual in the terrain of life.

Dinakaran's ideology about the relationship with nature goes like this in the novel “Our truth, dear children, is our primeval oneness with this earth, this water, this

forest, these birds and these fish!” (Joseph,242). The people of Aathi under the leadership of Dinakaran decided to uphold the integrity of nature once again. They realized the significance of preserving the five elements of nature-water, fire, air, soil and earth.

It was upon their age long serenity that Kumaran blew the strong tidal waves of darkness in the name of civilization. Dinakaran was the wisest man in Aathi. When Kumaran came with ‘behemoth’ project of filling the land and making Aathi into a high- tech city, Dinakaran along with Kunjimathu, Ponmani and Shylaja protested it. They sought the help of Adv. Grace Chali to file petitions against the filling up of land. But Kumaran had securely gagged the mouths of those who should have asked questions.

Kumaran subsided the fury of the agitators by giving them compensation and he asks a rhetorical question “Is there anything in the world that money cannot buy or compensate?” (Joseph 273).

The novel shows that there are a lot of things money cannot buy or compensate with. The tribal chieftain of Seattle, in his famous letter to the President of America, shared his doubt that how could we buy and sell the sky, the air and the water. Indians had a primitive culture which worshipped the five elements of nature with reverence. It is a sin to commodify the elements of nature. When man started viewing the elements of earth as objects for making profit, then started the ecological disasters. The novel depicts the predatory paradigm –shift from agriculture to agri-business concept that has spoiled our land and water.

The waters of Aathi are not inclined to dry up and vanish just because Kumaran wants it to happen. They worked with one mind, one voice and one will till they saw waves of green swaying in the paddy fields. They decided to mark a new beginning in Aathi as they started their life initially. “They had no food, no clothes, and no shelter. But one thing they had: water. It lay full and brimming, like the miracle of miracles. Water: the unending, ever renewing fountain-spring of life” (44).

Bioregionalism provides the perspective that by living within the limits and the gifts provided by a particular place, we can create a way of life that can be passed on to the future generation. We need to enlighten the future generations to create sustainable community. We must revitalize our educational, business, and political communities to manifest the principles of ecology. The bioregion has a great importance in the life of a person. To know the life-place is to know oneself. Culture and identity of a person are determined by the nature. People who take care of the life-place are the key to humanity.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Gift in Green* reassures the fact that there is an undeniable affinity with the human psyche and the dwelling place, suggesting an intrinsic interconnectedness. The affinity underscores the reciprocal influence between individuals and their environment, shaping identity and experience. Bioregional reading of this novel would prompt the reader to ask certain retrospective questions and find solutions through the powerful blend of nature and culture. Bioregionalism advocates that the health of natural systems is directly connected to the physical as well as the psychic health of the individuals and species, and for that reason natural system deserves, clearest attention and deepest respect.

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